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ABSTRACT

A community college instructor has incorporated the philosophy of Blaise Pascal into a course on organizational communication by providing community college students with a pragmatic small group exercise that requires them to see what communication skills are necessary to succeed within business and the community. This paper discusses how instructors can design a small group exercise to create community relationships, what organizations expect from a student with an Associate of Arts degree, and how the student can apply, as well as facilitate, the small group exercise within a typical communication course. The paper points out that a small group exercise that directs students to assess a community organization will require the instructor to provide some direction. By requiring the students to assess and analyze an organization within the community, students gain the sense that they are applying communication skills they have learned to the "real world." The assignment included in this paper, designing and presenting a grant proposal, is effective because it requires students to apply problem-solution decision making, the Planning and Reviewing Technique (PERT), and persuasive appeals within the assignment. Included are detailed directions for the assignment. (NKA)

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The Community View

Western States Communication Association
Convention

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If We Build It, Will They Come?

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CS 510 243

"We are more easily persuaded, in general, by the reasons that we ourselves discover than by those which are given to us by others." – Blaise Pascal

Often, by the end of a community college course in the study of communication, students who are interested in the study of communication will ask a most practical question, "So, what can I do with an A.A. degree in organizational communication?" Anticipating this practical question, I have incorporated the philosophy of Pascal into my course by providing students with a pragmatic small group exercise that requires the students to see what communication skills are necessary to succeed within business and the community. By requiring the students to create relationships with the community within a small group exercise, the ultimate objective is that the students will discover "the reasons by themselves" as to the value and essential need for effective communication skills. In this essay, I will discuss how instructors can design a small group exercise to create community relationships, what organizations expect from a student with an Associate of Arts degree, and how the instructor can apply, as well as facilitate, the small group exercise within a typical communication course.

Creating Community Relationships

As instructors, we can act as a bridge between student goals and an awareness of community needs. One bridge is to design a small group project that requires students to represent or analyze an existing, actual community organization. For instance, I require the students to select an existing, actual community organization and to design a presentation that is a grant proposal; the students are to persuade the audience to fund their community organization. To help motivate the students, one small group is competing against another small group in the class for the grant funding. At the conclusion of this essay, a sample small group project is provided to demonstrate how to include community organizations within a course assignment.

Designing and building this bridge, a small group exercise that directs students to assess a community organization, will require the instructor to provide some direction to the students. How can the students find a community organization? Within the local telephone directories (the yellow pages) there is a section entitled "Community Services," (either in the front or under the letter "C" in the directory) which lists numerous local community organizations by category, such as Abuse and Family services, or Elderly support services, or Food and Meal programs. Similarly, the United Way provides directories to many metropolitan areas and surrounding cities, which can be contacted by

calling 1-800-725-5314 or on-line to www.uwschicago.org/index.html. When explaining the small group exercise to the students, the instructor can list these resources on the board. Many students will select a community organization near their residence or one that they are familiar with based upon past experience. The students will contact the community organization for information and the awareness is established of the types of services that community provides.

By requiring the students to assess and analyze an organization within the community, students gain the sense that they are applying communication skills that we teach to the "real world." There are many small group projects that an instructor could require their students to process while examining an existing, community organization. For instance, small groups could plan a fund raiser; design a Public Service Announcement (perhaps on video); identifying how an organization manages conflict; or attending an actual small group meeting within the community organization. The assignment included in this essay, designing and presenting a grant proposal, is effective because it requires students to apply problem-solution decision-making, the Planning and Reviewing Technique (PERT), and persuasive appeals within the assignment. As the assignment progresses, students begin to discover the reasons for effective communication.

The Expectations of an Organization and the Student

When initially explaining the assignment of representing or analyzing a community organization, the instructor can explain what this community organization will expect from the students. I prefer to begin my explanation of the assignment with survey results provided by Job Outlook 1997, a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. The national survey concludes that the skills that "employers are looking for in college graduates" are ranked as follows:

1. *Oral Communication,*
2. *Interpersonal Communication skills,*
3. Analytical skills,
4. *Teamwork,*
5. Flexibility,
6. Computer skills,
7. Proficiency in the Field of Study,
8. Written Communication Skills,
9. *Leadership,* and
10. Work experience.

I then iterate the communication skills that are prominent within this list generated by organizations within the United States. I explain the assignment, representing an

existing community organization, should help demonstrate to these students the communication skills that they will need within a business and community organization. Hopefully, as students progress within the small group exercise, they are "discovering for themselves" the skills of oral, interpersonal, and written communication while cooperating as a group with teamwork.

Applying the Group Exercise in the Classroom

The following activity is just one example of how a small group project can bridge the student and a community organization. At the conclusion of the exercise are the material that I provide to the student. Having facilitated this exercise within the classroom periodically for the past three years, I have found the small group project to be a valuable exercise. This exercise truly is a bridge that accomplishes many educational objectives while providing the student with an understanding of the need for effective communication as well as a greater awareness of the community. This exercise is just one sample of how the instructor can implement a pragmatic small group exercise that allows the students to "discover for themselves" the value of an A.A. degree in organizational communication while creating relationships within the community view.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: The Grant Proposal (A Small Group Exercise)

Goals of the Activity:

To have the student organize the problem-solution group discussion (using the Procedural Model of Problem-Solving).

To have the student apply the Planning Evaluation Review Technique.

To have the student design a persuasive appeal to a target audience.

Time Required:

This activity is designed for a 50 minute class session, with a small group presentation limited a time of 15 to 20 minutes. This allows two groups to "compete" and both groups present in the same class period. Each student must speak for at least three minutes.

For a 75 minute class session, the small group presentation can be extended to a 25 to 30 minute time limit. Each student could then speak for at least four minutes.

Including debriefing time and drawing links to the text, the initial explanation of the assignment takes about 40 minutes. Allow another 5 minutes for any questions.

The instructor may choose to dedicate six 50 minute class sessions for the small groups to meet, with small group presentations beginning on the 7th class session. This has generally been sufficient time for groups to successfully accomplish this assignment.

Directions:

Before the debriefing of the small group exercise, the instructor may choose to present the survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers listed in Job Outlook, 1997 (listed within this essay). This provides a rationale and the objectives of this small group exercise . This is an optional yet useful step.

1. Explain to the students what an "umbrella charitable organization" is. One good example is that of United Way, that receives charitable contributions and then distributes the available funds to many different charities or community organizations. Then explain the fictitious charitable organization of Goodfolks USA, a non-profit organization. The members of Goodfolks, USA are elderly people who fund raise and receive charitable donations. Goodfolks, USA then distributes the money to any charity in the United States through the form of a "grant."

2. Explain that the small group will select their own community organization and design a "grant proposal." Their actual group presentation will be to the members of Goodfolks, USA, who will decide whether or not to fund the small group's community organization with $100,000. The group's goal is to persuade these elderly member's that the group's community organization is the best choice for the grant money!

3. Explain the small group will compete with another small group on the same day. Both groups will present their grant proposal. The audience members, role-playing as elderly Goodfolks, USA members, will decide which one of the two groups will "win" the grant money of $100,000.

4. Explain the requirements on the following hand-outs provided to the students: The requirements:
   -- a typed 1-2 page group outline in the problem-solution format.
   --the group outline must provide five published sources with a bibliography in the Modern Language Association format.
   -- Each individual must provide a typed, ome page individual summary in essay format.
   --Within the group presentation, the group must present a Planning and Review Technique (PERT) chart which demonstrates what the group will do with the grant funds following a calendar schedule.
   --the group must have three visual aids (the PERT chart may be one of the visual aids).
   --the group presentation must answer ALL of the six "key questions" provided in their directions. (See the Small Group Project: The Grant Proposal handout.)

5. Explain that the small group must select an existing, actual community organization. If the community organization requests a phone call or written letter, the instructor can provide what is requested by the community organization to verify and explain this assignment.

6. On the presentation day(s), either recruit students from other classes, or have some class members serve as members of Goodfolks, USA (See the final sheet).

Small Group Communication Dan DuBray

Small Group Project: The Grant Proposal

Objective: To research, prepare and present a 15 - 20 minute presentation that will convince the audience that your "organization" should be awarded a Grant for $100,000.00 by the Goodfolks nonprofit organization.

Each group member must speak for a minimum of two minutes.

Assignment: Select an actual, existing organization (a charity, club, social program, etc.) that is attempting to address a social issue or concern. Imagine that you represent this organization. Imagine that *Goodfolks USA*, a non-profit organization of elderly, retired citizens that donate time and money to programs for social improvement, is offering $100,000.00 to an organization that Goodfolks perceives to be a worthy cause. This year was a tough year for Goodfolks...the competition to receive a "grant" for your organization in the next fiscal year will be a tough one. *Your presentation is to convince the Board of Goodfolks (some selected members of the class) to award a grant to your program next year.*

Requirements: Begin your first session with a brain-storming session!

Outline: You must present a typed 1-2 page outline in the problem-solution format as well as the order that each group member will present the material within the outline. Each individual must have a typed 1-2 page synopsis written in complete sentences of the individual material that will be presented. *Your group outline and individual synopsis must be typed and submitted on the day of your presentation, at the beginning of class, or you will NOT be permitted to present your group project!*

Sources: 5 sources other than yourself that are listed in the Modern Language Association format which are:

--Listed in a bibliography at the end of the outline; and

--cited verbally (all 5 sources) within your presentation by the source's name, publication/title and date of publication. If you choose to interview a person, cite the person by name, position or title, and the date of the interview. Type an interview summary (provide a name and phone number where the person can be reached so that I can verify the source by phone).

**For each source, you must submit a photocopy of the page of the publication that highlights the quote, chart, graph, etc., at the end of the outline. Identify the source with a heading on the photocopy so that I can match the source to your bibliography.

Plan: You must present a Planning Review Evaluation Technique chart.

Visual Aids: You must present 3 visual aids (one may be your PERT chart).

Content: Answer these 6 key questions that the "Board" would want to know:

*What is the problem or social concern that establishes the need for your organization's service?

*How does the problem affect the audience?(the so-what question)

*What is a brief history and background of your organization?

*What specifically will your organization do with the grant? (PERT)

*How does your organization solve some of the problems pertaining to your social issue or concern?

*How does your organization differ from other organizations?

I. Attention-Getter: 2 minutes

II. Relate the Topic to the Audience: (Use a source citation, statistics, etc.)

III. Preview/Thematic Statement: Provide a road-map of what you will cover.

BODY

I. Statement of the Problem *(Barney, Betty)*

A. Describe the problem. 2 minutes

1. Describe the signs, symptoms, or CAUSES of the problem.
2. Provide evidence of the problem (testimony, a narrative, etc.)

B. Explain the Importance of the problem. *(Pebbles, Dino)*

1. The extent or scope of the problem, and/or 3 minutes
   the EFFECTS of the problem. (Show video-- Sample of visual aid)

2. Who is affected by the problem. How does this affect the audience?
3. What will happen if the problem is NOT solved...be sure to humanize the problem.

II. Present the Solution *(Wilma, Fred)*

A. Describe the Solution (Your organization!) 2 minutes

1. Briefly describe your organization's history and/or background.
2. Demonstrate how the solution addresses the problem.
3. Describe how the solution can be implemented. *(Betty, Barney)*
   a. Present a specific plan of action (What will you do with the money?). ***PRESENT YOUR PERT CHART!!!*** 4 minutes
   b. Show the costs, efforts and feasibility of the solution.
   (Show budget chart--Sample of visual)

B. Describe the Results to the Listener. *(Dino, Pebbles)*

1. Describe the benefits of the solution. 3 minutes
2. Explain when the results can be expected.
3. RELATE THE BENEFITS DIRECTLY TO THE LISTENER!!!

CONCLUSION: *(Fred, Wilma)* 2 minutes

I. Summary: How your organization solves a social concern/issue.

II. Call to action: Officially request Goodfolks donate the $100,000.00

III. Concluding Remark (Make a memorable statement--a quote, statistic, etc.)

Sources (Bibliography listed here in MLA format--see your text reference)

The Presentation: *60 points* possible:

Organization: The Outline, *3 visuals* and presentation are clear and understandable. 10 points
The presentation is prepared before class on the presentation day.

Presentation: Each group member is organized and participates in the presentation. 10 points
The Group presentation is smooth and meets the time allotted.
Each Group member has eye contact and speaks for at least 2 minutes.

Content: Are each of the 6 questions clearly answered in the presentation? 20 points
The Problem, Organization, and how the money will be spent is clearly feasible.

Substance: The material relates the topic to our Board of Senior Citizens of Goodfolks. 20 points
The significance and importance of the organization is demonstrated.

The Grant Proposal Project: The Individual Presentation

For the Individual Presentation, you must submit a typed summary of the points that you will cover within the group presentation. You must speak for a minimum of three minutes. YOU MUST SUBMIT THE TYPED SUMMARY IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION!

This typed Individal Summary is due on the day of your group presentation.

Name:_____

Because of the time limit, you will need to be extremely prepared!

The typed summary should explain the concept(s) or points that you will present.

Your presentation will be graded on the following scale:

Organization: Is the speaker prepared to speak for at least 2 - 3 minutes? **10 points**

Content: Are the points clearly explained within the presentation?
Does the speaker relate the topic to the audience?
Any source citations provided are cited correctly by name, title of publication/person, and year. **20 points**

Delivery:

The speaker attempts to maintain eye contact with the class members, even while using any visual aids. **20 points**

The speaker speaks (not reading from note cards) to the audience.
The speaker is loud enough for the back row of the audience to hear. **20 points**

The speaker holds or gestures to any materials while still facing the audience (such that the audience can still see the speaker's face). **20 points**

The speaker is prepared and knows the material that is presented. **10 points**

Prepare well and have fun!!!

Thank you for volunteering to be a Board Member (Student Evaluator)

You are a Board Member of GOODFOLKS, a national charitable organization of elderly people that are semi-retired or retired. These senior citizens of GOODFOLKS organize fund-raisers through out the United States and then donate the money to smaller, local charities.

You are to observe a small group presentation. The small group is a local charity that is trying to convince you that their group has a charitable organization and plan worthy of a "grant". You have two tasks:

1) to fill out the following evaluation for each group presentation. The group will read these later; try to write legibly.
2) to vote at the end of class as to which small group (local charity) you would award a $100,000 grant. There cannot be a tie. Your vote will be by silent ballot.

As you watch the presentation, remember that you are role-playing a senior citizen, which means that issues of health, children (probably grandchildren), and concerns for the elderly are important to you (more so than the issues might now be).
Other than role-playing a senior citizen, you may go by any personal interests that you currently have. Fill out one evaluation sheet per EACH group you observe.
Evaluation: Please respond to the following questions in complete sentences.

1. How did this group relate their social problem and solution to you as a "senior citizen" and Board Member?

2. What was persuasive (logically or emotionally) to you within their presentation?

3. How confident are you that the group would "wisely" and effectively spend your hard earned fund-raiser money?
   How feasible is this group's plan in funding and scheduling?

4. What did you enjoy the most about this presentation?

5. What suggestions do you have to improve the presentation?